What is Death and Can We Reduce its Fear?

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Introduction

Death is the most certain thing for any living entity and yet we know so little about it. It may come earlier or later in life but the inevitable always happens. Yet we carry out our actions and behave as if we are immortal and death does not enter our scheme of things.

In a way that maybe a good thing because the fear of death may not allow us to be bold enough to do lots of things in life. Nevertheless, if we understand death then we will really understand life, and this will help us to live it fruitfully and happily and not be afraid when the end comes. Reducing the fear of death is the best way to live a happy life.

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Through time immemorial in all civilizations, tomes have been written on death. Almost in every society the spiritual writings are about the art of living which prepare human beings for death. *Also, by putting the fear of death in the human beings quite a number of religions and their leaders have exercised control over them by promising better after-life.*

As we grow older death does appear more often in our vision field since this is a part of cycle closure and evolutionary process. Hence a curiosity arose about what is the nature of death; why we fear it and can we reduce this fear. I wrote my first book "Nature of Human Thought" in 2004 and one of the main chapters in it was on death. It was based on the basic tenet of Indian philosophy and how it pertains to death. Most of the material was therefore heuristic in nature and death was explained in general philosophical terms.

Death is a very physical process and is the final shutdown of the life process leading to the exit of the "self" or memory from the body. Hence, I felt that it should be governed by physical, physiological and neurobiological laws. If we understand these laws, then I feel the fear and pain of death could be reduced. This curiosity and thinking have led to this small essay.

Fear of Death

All living entities from the smallest to the largest fear death. *In fact, fear defines an entity as living.* This fear differentiates us from non-living entities like AI powered beings. Fear is ingrained in the DNA of all living entities from time immemorial and is a part of the evolutionary process. If there is no fear, there will be no life. *Fear is the engine for the desire to live.* And death completes the evolutionary cycle and is necessary for the evolution and rejuvenation of genetic material. *Thus, fear and death are related and are the basis of life.*

The fear of death comes mainly from three sources: the fear of losing our form; fear of unknown; and physical and emotional pain accompanying it.

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Loss of form means losing the body and lifetime memories attached to it and this probably produces both emotional and physical pain. *Our memories define us and are the only meaningful possessions we have. Losing them completely at the time of death produces fear. We know deep down that the combination of our present form and with it its unique memories cannot be replicated in any reincarnations and that is why we fear losing it.*

If by chance in future, we develop technologies which will keep our memories intact then the fear of death will be reduced drastically.

The fear of unknown comes because we cannot predict what will happen in future. What will happen to our possessions and to our family is a great cause of concern because we are attached to them and do not want to lose them. With death, all the memories attached to them will be lost and this produces fear of unknown.

The fear of unknown therefore is of present life. We are afraid because we can think about the unfulfilled future possibilities or unknown. Our insecurities give us this fear of the unknown since we can think about them but cannot do very much about them. Nevertheless, once we are gone there is no uncertainty. Hence one of the ways to remove this fear is not to think about death and what will happen to all our memories after we are gone. That could have been the basis of detachment preached in our ancient scriptures.

Fear of unknown also comes from rebirth. Some people say that there is reincarnation and based upon our karma we may be born in different and sometimes unfortunate situations (poor home, in other life forms, etc., etc.). This uncertainty and unknown future sometimes cause fear.

However, very few people or life forms remember their past birth. Data from various sources of reincarnation show that the very few who do remember their past births mostly forget about it by the age of 5-6 years. One possibility

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could be that as the new self or ego starts taking shape (mostly formed at this age) the old memories are forgotten.

Reports also suggest that for those few who remember their past births there is no mention of pain which they experienced either during their early life or during the death. So, all the memories of pain, etc. of past birth are attached to the form and the body. Once the body is gone the pain also goes away and is never carried over to the present birth.

Similarly for people who have experienced out of body experience (OBE) or near-death experience (NDE) there is no sensation of pain, so pain is connected with the physical body and its memories. *Thus, pain and fear of death is the figment of the present body, brain and memories.* As long we have a body there will be a fear of death, triggered by the pain sensation.

Pain

Why is there pain in all living beings? Pain is a sensation which allows us to take corrective measure for the body repair. Without pain we will not be able to do so. As long as a body and form exist there will be pain. All life experiences pain: some express it while others suffer in silence.

Bodies of living beings are a marvelous piece of engineering with a self-healing capability. Left to themselves most bodies repair themselves. In most animals when pain comes, they simply try to shut off all activities so that the body auto-repairs it. Modern humans are fast-paced and active, and we want the body to be performing its function without rest; so, we take medicines and other corrective actions like surgery etc. to get it repaired.

The reaction by cells to danger and threat sometimes results in producing inflammation and pain. Inflammation helps in the healing process but sometimes it goes out of hand (nobody knows why), and this leads to runaway events like cancer and tumor formation and other situations where cell production gets out of control. Thus, the pain in the body is an outcome of

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the inflammation caused by cell death and hence we are programmed to think that death is accompanied by pain. All life wants to avoid pain, and this creates fear. This is also a part of fear of death.

If we can make death painless then most of the fear of death will go away. Modern medicines sometimes help in reducing pain. However, death by sudden mishap like heart attack, accidents, in sleep etc. is painless.

Emotional pain is an outcome of fear and attachment – losing a loved one, losing a job, breakup, etc. etc. During death emotional pain comes from losing our form and memories to which we are attached while physical pain comes from the inflammation in the body. Interestingly both pains excite the same centers in the brain. It can be conjectured that *during normal death (due to old age, disease, etc.) there is a frantic conversation between brain and body memories since both have to be shed but ultimately the brain decides when to end the existence and that results in brain death.*

However, when the death is sudden and painless for e.g. during sleep, due to accident, by heart failure, etc., etc. it is possible that the body memory does not have the time to interact with the brain which then becomes the overriding entity to decide about the exit. This is very evident in the case of suicides. The body may be healthy, but the brain is distraught and in tremendous emotional pain; and decides to take the drastic action. There are speculations that this may result in ghost formation.

Pain Reduction

Most of the pain signals from the body reach the brain through the spinal cord. Ancient Yogis somehow knew how to stop these signals reaching the brain by the practice of *Kundalini Yoga* and hence could reduce the pain of death. It is a very difficult procedure to master *Kundalini Yoga* but the possibility exists. Pain reducing agents or opioids in modern medicines do the same thing. However, continuous use of opioids leads to addiction and have

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serious side effects. Data suggests large number of deaths occur because of their overdosage.

The greatest effort of mankind should therefore be directed towards developing pain-reduction technologies and systems which are easy on the body and with very few side effects. *If it can be done, then it will be one of the greatest inventions of the world and will have a far-reaching effect on the physical and mental well-being of mankind.* It may well provide the elixir of life. Unfortunately because of greed, big pharma companies all over the world are not putting enough resources into this area.

Tomes have been written in philosophical and spiritual literature all over the world and in different civilizations on how to reduce emotional and physical pain. In fact, Sidhartha became Gautam Buddha when he saw an old man suffering and dying and resolved to discover the process by which this pain could be reduced or removed. This is how he discovered Buddhism or the Middle Path.

Since the fear of death is very closely related to the memory of pain, it is instructive to look at the centers of these memories in the body.

Memories of Body and Mind

There are two types of memories in human beings. One is the brain memory which is the sum and substance of all our living experiences and is stored in neural pathways. The other is the memory of form or the body memory which probably resides in cells all over our body and is a storage of life-long experiences of the forces acting on our body. This memory of form is also mapped in the brain. During death both these memories are shed. The shedding of brain memory probably produces emotional pain whereas shedding of body memory produces mostly physical pain.

Brain memories are fairly well understood. However, understanding of cellular or body memories is a recent phenomenon and not a fully developed field.

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Nevertheless, I feel cellular memory may play a major role in the fear and pain of death.

Cellular Memory

We exist because of cells. Cells are the basic building blocks of all living things and every part of the body contains cells. There are about 40 trillion cells in human body (including those in the gut bacteria) though the exact number is not known. In comparison the number of neurons in the brain are around 86 billion. *Thus the cell numbers outnumber neurons by more than 450 times.*

The cells vary in size depending on their function but have an average size of 20-30 micrometers (microns). By comparison human hair is about 20-200 microns thick.

Cells are basically mini factories; they take material from the surroundings and convert it into energy; create new materials (genetic information); create structures like bones and muscles; and replicate themselves. *Thus, they take part in managing every aspect of the body function.* Cells also have memory which they acquire through the system of epigenome, and it can be conjectured that the *combined memories of all cells form the body memory.*

Some of the cells also have long term memory. There have been many instances where organ transplantation has resulted in a change of behavior in the organ receiver. Scientists speculate that this could only happen due to body or cellular memory embedded in the organ. We still do not know whether the cell memories are also a product of rudimentary *"cell neural pathways".*

Zombie Genes

Then there are Zombie genes in the body. They multiply after the death of the organism, and nobody knows why this happens. It seems the body memory fights death as dictated by brain. We can speculate that this conflict might happen because of lack of equilibrium between what the brain orders and body's response. Thus, body cells fight death which leads to inflammation and the cause of pain.

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Since cells memories are many times more than the brain memories one can speculate that they might want to have a say at the time of death! Such a thing is probably true because zombie genes do not want to die and in fact help cells to fight death.

Brain cells dictate the shutting down of heart and lungs, but body cells resist this shutting down. It is possible that the body cells which give rise to the form of an organism resist the dissolution of form. Why this happens is still a mystery. The form map exists in the brain, but it cannot simply erase it. That signal has to come from the cellular memory. It is the removal of cellular memory which might give rise to physical pain.

Less than a decade ago researchers debunked the long-held belief that gene expression, which is the hallmark of life, ceases at the time of death. After death zombie genes also activate other genes like cell stress responses, inflammation, immunity and cancer cells. So, when organism dies cells rage against the process. Cells don't want to die. *Increase in cancer gene expression in a dead organism infects the organs immediately and could be detrimental to the process of donation and transplantation.*

Cell Communication

For smooth running of the body, cells communicate with each other. Cells communicate to help in growth, development, differentiation, etc. and also to transmit danger signals (during certain cell death). Besides they also communicate to activate the immune defense system when injury or infection takes place. At the same time during death this communication with the brain becomes of paramount importance for helping in the shedding and release of memories from the body.

Communication among them takes place mostly by chemical means (by the exchange of molecules through the blood flow). The blood flow is slow, and sometimes the cells need to communicate rapidly for example during death or

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perception of danger to the body. A possible fast communication channel could be through photonic means.

The exchange of molecules anywhere in the biological system produces bio-photons as a byproduct of chemical reaction and could help the cells to communicate photonically. It is fastest way for cells to communicate with each other and with other parts of the body.

Memory Transfer After Death

Throughout the history of mankind almost all civilizations have believed in afterlife and reincarnation. Thus, the rituals of burying the dead and mummification were part of this belief. Even in the Hindu religion where the dead body is burnt there is a very strong belief in reincarnation.

We can conjecture that what passes from one body to another is memory. We are not sure what this memory is but could be the basic unit. And the transfer could be possible via the process of soliton. Thus, the intense brain activity just at the time of death may allow these holographic memories to be converted into soliton and transferred.

Data from the dying brain shows a heightened activity in the gamma wave region. Interestingly gamma waves (~ 30-100 Hz) are also produced in the brain under very intense brain activity like deep meditation. It is quite possible that this intense brain activity, which is like a *Sanyam*, may produce a thought soliton. This could be the mechanism by which memory could be transferred at the time of death and remains stable for some time till rebirth takes place.

Thus, for Yogis, deep thinkers or highly experienced meditation experts the transition during death, where the brain emits gamma wave could be very easy. *It is also interesting to note that gamma waves emission during death has also been seen in rats, and may exist in all life forms.*

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Reincarnation

There are people who do not believe in life after death or reincarnation and think that after death everything finishes with the body. However, there is strong proof from a large number of cases where there has been a total recall of past lives and events by individuals (especially children) and these cases have been reported in all societies and in almost all religions. Hence, we will take the data of these cases as experiential fact and assume that there could be reincarnation and life after death.

How and where the rebirth takes place is not known and could be purely by chance. Even Patanjali has spoken about it in his yoga sutras. However, for advanced yogis who have mastered the art of intense meditation it is possible that they may be able to decide where they will be born.

Interestingly for children who have reported their past births there was no mention of pain or fear of death and in any case those memories are lost by the age of 5-6 years.

Similarly, the fear of death has also been reduced in people who have experienced near death experience (NDE). NDE seems to happen when a person is declared clinically dead but after some time returns to life. Quite a number of people during NDE episode have reported that their whole life flashed by and almost all their past actions became visible. In majority of the cases tremendous positive change in attitude towards life and death took place after an NDE episode. They were not afraid of death anymore.

Thus, if we think of death and our memories as a part of continuum (as evidenced from NDE and reincarnation episodes) where part of our memories might reincarnate then we may be less afraid of death. However, reincarnation is by chance as Sage Patanjali has stated and could be in any form. When that happens, our memory processing and evolution (depending upon which form we are reincarnated into) may be disrupted. That could also be the cause of fear of the unknown after death.

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It is a sobering thought to ponder that nobody really knows what happens to our memories after death. Mostly there are speculations. At best we can conjecture that a basic unit of our present memory passes for rebirth. Therefore many deep discussions in Indian philosophical systems like Mahabharat, Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, etc. have therefore veered towards instructing people to live a good life since they cannot provide a satisfactory answer to this conundrum.

Leading a Good Life and other Issues

So how does one lead his/her life so that it is happy, and death is painless and is welcomed more like a friend when it comes? Tomes have been written on this subject and the great masters of this world like Christ, Buddha, Patanjali and others have spoken about it from their direct experiences. It will be therefore arrogant on my part to say anything more than what they have already said.

From the present knowledge we can conjecture that to have a good life we must reduce the physical pain by developing wholesome pain management system which provides good health and happiness. Emotional pain can be reduced by living in harmony with nature and all the surrounding forces and practicing spirituality. Spirituality gives us wisdom to curb our greed and use the resources of earth efficiently. Reduction of greed is the best way to create sustainability and happiness.

One of the strongest forces surrounding us is gravity and earth's EM fields. Our body and mind can interact with earth's magnetic and gravity fields. If right from childhood, we are taught meditation and *Sanyam* then it can help us in tuning our bodies to these fields and create calmness and happiness in us so that death may not be fearful and painful. This process will also make us live sustainably in this world. We could then rightly be called *Earth People*. Our happy memories which will remain attached to the gravity field of earth after death will then guide us to a brighter future.

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Since time immemorial mankind has always dreamt of getting out of earth's gravity field and reaching the stars. In all cultures, gods have been depicted as shining beings descending from heaven in flying chariots and blazing machines. One of the reasons could be the desire to get away from the pains and miseries of this planet earth and go to other habitable planets which may provide a better place to live. This could be the basis of concept of heaven preached in almost all religions. Thus, leaving the gravity field of earth and flying into intergalactic space is somehow deeply ingrained in our brains.

We do not yet possess the technology for intergalactic space travel but there are possibilities that we may be able to do so via the soul route and some people believe that reincarnation in other worlds is possible.

Nevertheless, a better solution is if we make this world of ours a very hospitable place then this will be the heaven that our ancient scriptures talk about, and we may not have to spend time and energy to leave the gravity field of this earth. *Our technological progress should therefore be aimed towards this noble goal.*

HOME

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